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Statement submitted by Mouvement mondial des mères international, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 30 and 31 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

* E/2014/1/Rev.1, annex II.

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Statement

In the agreed conclusions which it adopted at its fifty-eighth session, the Commission on the Status of Women recognized "that almost 15 years after the Millennium Development Goals were adopted, no country has achieved equality for women and girls, and significant levels of inequality between women and men persist" and "overall progress for women and girls across all the Millennium Development Goals remains slow and uneven, including on Goal 3 [Promote gender equality and empower women], both within and between countries, and that lack of progress on gender equality has hindered progress towards all of the Goals".

Progress on gender equality has been slow, and a reason might be that the indicators (notably indicator 3.2 — share of women in wage employment in the non-agricultural sector, and indicator 3.3 — proportion of seats held by women in national parliament), focus mainly on inequality outcome rather than the structural causes and discriminatory laws and social institutions that are at the root of and sustain gender inequality.

In particular, these indicators overlook a fundamental structural cause of gender inequality, which is motherhood and women's overwhelming responsibility for unpaid care work in homes and communities all over the world.

The Mouvement mondial des mères welcomes recent developments that show the increasing attention on unpaid care work as being a core issue for gender equality and development, and that pave the way for its introduction in the development agendas, and advancing on its recognition, reduction and redistribution, notably:

- The October 2013 report to the General Assembly of the Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights (A/68/293) that rightly frames unpaid care work as a major human rights issue and a root cause of women's specific vulnerability to poverty
- Resolution I adopted at the nineteenth International Conference of Labour Statisticians in October 2013 that expands the definition of work, to include "own-use production work comprising production of goods and services for own final use", i.e., unpaid care work in households. The resolution should pave the way for the extension of social protection and pensions benefits to unpaid caregivers, notably mothers. It will also provide a further impetus for member States to deliver country comparable data on care work, notably through time-use surveys
- The work undertaken at the Economic Commission for Europe Conference of European Statisticians to promote the use of time-use surveys to provide data on unpaid care work, and to provide guidelines and support for their implementation, as well as the work of the United Nations Statistical Division on a new International Classification of Activities for Time-Use Statistics
- The agreed conclusions of the Commission on the Status of Women at its fifty-eighth session that lists unpaid care work among the issues that the Millennium Development Goals failed to capture on Goal 3

The feminization of caring responsibilities and the disproportionate time women devote to care compared with men contributes to women's subordinate position both in economic and political lives, perpetuating gender inequality.

The issue of unpaid care work is especially important in places where in addition to cooking and cleaning, caring and nurturing, women (and children) have to fetch wood and water for domestic consumption, and/or engage in subsistence farming to feed their families.

Unpaid care work can be very time- and energy-consuming, especially in areas deprived of basic public infrastructure and services, where basically unpaid care work has to compensate for lack of infrastructure such as the provision of water and sanitation, and energy, transportation and communications services, and can become a real drudgery. The lack of proximity services in rural or remote areas, such as child- and elderly-care services, schools, health-care services and other social services, also put an extra burden of unpaid care work on women, in particular mothers of young children.

As a result, women have limited mobility and no or little time to engage in income-generating activities, not to speak of political participation. Too many women lack economic autonomy and independence, and have no choice and no control over their own lives, which in turn contribute to unequal power relationships with men at all levels. It also has a direct link with the feminization of poverty, especially in old age.

Even if they are able to do so, women's participation in paid work is not in itself empowering if they are still bearing the primary responsibility for unpaid care work at home, in effect working a "second shift" after their paid work day, and overall working more than men when the time devoted to paid and unpaid work are combined. Time poverty was among the main concerns expressed by mothers in the 2011 survey on "What matters to mothers in Europe" conducted by our organization.

At the same time, care is not only about material needs, but also responds to developmental and emotional needs. Its central importance to societal and human well-being, as well as to the formation of "human capital" provided by parents through non-formal education, emotional nurturing and transmission of values, are too often overlooked, and need to be better recognized and supported.

For the foregoing reasons, the organization calls for:

A shift in focus from development indicators that are rather outcomes of gender inequalities to indicators that reflect the structural causes of gender inequality and discriminatory laws and social institutions. These should be part of a stand-alone goal on gender equality to follow on Goal 3 in the post-2015 development agenda, and notably include:

Time measurement of unpaid care work, and its unequal distribution; such a core indicator would make this essential work visible and allow for the monitoring of its reduction (through gender-sensitive infrastructure and services development) and its redistribution between men and women, and between households and other stakeholders, primarily the State, but also the private and non-profit sectors;

Women's participation in decision-making on policies that affect their lives, notably with regard to the development of public infrastructure and services, which are key for the reduction of unpaid care work, especially in rural or remote areas of developing countries;

Engagement of countries on work-family balance policies (e.g., availability of child and elderly care, flexible work, part-time work, etc.) and on the implementation of a life-cycle approach to women's work (i.e., recognition of women's dual role as economic producer and caregiver and its evolution over the life course);

Continuation of all efforts to bring to and retain girls in schools and universities, as education is the basis for self-determination, improved health, as well as social and economic status, and a key condition for the empowerment of women; and the extension of education goals to early childhood education that benefit both children and their mothers;

More generally, a post-2015 development agenda that prioritizes long-term human well-being rather than fostering short-term gains and "economic growth", and that gives care its right place and value as an essential element for societal and human well-being.